

LOS ANGELES PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETY AND INSTITUTE

BION TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

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I would like to start by reminding you of a quotation from Freud's book on the inhibition symptoms in anxiety. It is this:

"There is much more continuity between intrauterine life and earlier infancy than the impressive caesura of birth would have us believe. I hope that there will turn out also to be much more continuity between Dr. Mahler and myself with this intervening impressive caesura of the conference. La reponse est la malheur de la question."

This quotation I owe to Dr. Andre Gide, but I do not owe my pronounciation to him. That is my own original contribution.

Now what I want to talk about...first of all this quotation of Freud's, I don't know if I'm misinterpreting it - I never do, of course...but I think that it is not inappropriate that he says..."than this impressive caesura would have us believe". As

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if it was the caesura which governed us. Now this reminds me of the early hermetic description in which one gets the impression that the phrenes is really the origin of the human sort and idea. A very reasonable scientific idea because it is so obvious that when people are expressing themselves, it's...(speaker demonstrates with heavy breathing)...up and down goes the diaphragm. What could be more sensible than to suppose that the phrenes would have us believe whatever it t'is. It takes a long time before...I think it's Democritus of Abdura who decides that this extraordinary mass of stuff, which you get located up here, has got something to do with thinking. But in the mean time, it is the diaphragm that is the important thing. It is the caesura that is the important thing. That is the sort of the thinking. Picasso could do something of this sort when on a piece of glass he could paint a picture and you could see that there was a picture painted; and if you looked on the other side of the glass, there was also a picture painted.

Now I want to suggest that this same thing can be said to be true of the caesura. It depends which way you look at it. What way you are traveling. Psychosomatic disorders or somapsychotic. Take your choice. I think that the picture should be recognizably the same whether you are looking at it from the psychosomatic position or whether you look at it from the somapsychotic position.

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Now, I think it will be very helpful to me if you could cooperate with me by making some attempt to achieve the same depth of ignorance as I managed to achieve and have brought home to me on these occasions. So that one could get back to a frame of mind which is near as possible denuded of preconceptions, serious, and so forth. It is really something of a mental acrobatic feat, I can well appreciate that. It's not easy for people who are well versed in anatomy, physiology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and so forth, to get back to this state of primary ignorance, as it were.

I want to say something which sounds just like saying something. And perhaps it t'is, I don't know. "Bloody cunt. Bloody vagina." Now this first expression is I suspect part of a universal language. It is not sexual. It is not physiological or anatomical. Not medical. It's something quite different. "Blood vagina" though could be the sort of thing about which doctors could talk. Probably obstetricians or gynecologists. What about this other one? Now I am not going to try to produce the answer, not because I hope that the cure is ignorance, but temporarily at any rate treating the answer as being a sort of disease of the question. Therefore I want to talk about...or draw attention really to these sounds. "Bloody cunt". As I

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say, cunt is not an anatomical or physiological phrase. What it is I don't know...indeed I throw it open to the members who are met together because if you investigate this question you may find what this very primitive and archaic language is. "Bloody" also has not got much to do with white cells, red cells, and so forth. It is in fact an abbreviation...an abbreviated way of talking about or using the term "by our Lady". So it is really a part and parcel of what in more sophisticated terms we should think of as being sacred. Now this is very peculiar. "Cunt" and this sacred term mixed up with it. I think that the sacred aspect of it would probably be much more meaningful to people who are familiar with the Roman Catholic Religion. But I think that we'll not find a similar sacred element without it necessarily having a Christian version. Now this is simply...by way of introduction...this is simply to try to draw attention to the actual sounds of this "bloody cunt" and whatever its counterparts are. I do not, for example, know to what extent these terms could be translated or recognized, shall we say, in Chinese or in Russian. Because there again there seems to be a certain difference which the Chinese, at any rate, can detect by the peculiar difference in muscular movement of the face which is, not in their observations, the same amongst Russians as it t'is amongst themselves. The advantage of a conference of this kind is that so many different kinds of experience can be brought to bear on these matters.

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Now the queer thing about that language, if you call it that, is that it seems to have a sort of archaic quality. Now that archaic quality nourishes the more intellectual and less lively aspects of one's characteristic thinking. Without its emerging into a point where one could verbalize it, it nevertheless nourishes it. A person, for example, who is very angry with somebody else would find that his intellectual and angry expression was nourished by these archaic factors which can't be given expression but do make the angry expression much more alive if the person who is addressed is called "a bloody cunt". It will almost certainly lead to a great deal of turmoil of one kind or another.

Now, at this point I want to get back again to this idea of turmoil. Leonardo in his notebooks has a great many drawings of water and of hair. Now that seems to be me to be an artistic delineation of the same turmoil. When we disperse to the loneliness of our respective consulting rooms...offices and so forth...I suggest again that what is there is turmoil. It may appear in a form which shows itself in verbal expression. It may appear in a form which would seem to be more appropriately called a latency stage. Paraneurus is described...and I think it's the end of the 5th book of the Illiad... where he answers Somnus saying that he must think that he is very

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inexperienced if he is led, while being responsible for steering the fleet, by the calm and beautiful surface of the Mediterrean Sea. This, I think, that we also do not need to forget, but I don't think we want to be misled by it...but the superficial and beautiful calm which pervades our various consulting rooms, institutions, and so forth.

A small child of my acquaintance, a little girl of about 5 or 6, was lying on the floor, studying a vast tome. It happened to be the 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britanica. In comes one of these people that we call adults and says, "Well, Mary, how you have grown." I'm sure we've all suffered from that kind of comment. She got up, pointed to the book, pointed to an illustration of the ovum and said, "I should just think I have!" There are many ways in which this can be done. We have just heard one in the last paper. The child who dints the hat and puts it on the head...I don't think that it needs much language to know...much sophisticated language, to know what that means. Another child, a baby, apparently quite satisfactory _____
_____ to born, who cried, yelled at birth and could not be quieted. The more the mother soothed the child, the more the child yelled. It became impossible for the mother to sleep because of this absolutely apparently indefatigable yelling that went on. What I want to suggest is that that is very late

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event in the story. Only hidden because of this impressive seizure of birth.

Now at this point I would like to indulge in some sort of scientific fictions. I don't mean by that that I am not taking the problem seriously, but because I know that I shall never get anywhere nearer to a scientific statement, but somebody here may be able to do so. It seems to me that from a very early stage the relationship between...well, the germ plasm and its environment...operates, and I don't see why it should leave some kind of trace...even after the impressive caesura of birth. After all if anatomists can say that they can detect a vesical. If surgeons, likewise, can say they can detect tumors which really derive from the branchial cleft. Well then, why should there not be what we would call "mental" vestiges or archaic elements which are operative in a way that is alarming and disturbing because it breaks through this beautiful calm surface which we ordinarily think of as rational, sane behavior. I don't suppose there'll ever be any chance of knowing, so to speak, what a fetus thinks. But, to go on with my scientific fiction, I am going to suggest that there's no reason why it shouldn't feel and indeed, I think it'd be quite convenient to consider that some stages of fear...of intense fear...are more easily visualized or imagined by us, if one thought of them as

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thalamic fear. Or some sort of glandular manifestation, such as something to do with the adrenals. Or what later on turn out to be the genital structures. Now you can look at that as you like, as memory traces, but these same memory traces can also be considered as the...as a shadow which the future casts before. One could say that this meeting itself can be regarded as an expression, as a revision, of such experience and knowledge as we've managed to pick up in the course of our lifetime. But it can also be regarded as showing the shadow of the future, which we don't know any more than we know the past, which it projects or it casts before. The caesura which have us believe the future...the future which would have us believe...or the past which would have us believe. Depending on which direction you're traveling in, as it were, and what you see.

Now, it seems to me that there are certain premature and precocious developments which are too premature and too precocious to be tolerable. Therefore, the fetus...the id, if there is such a thing...does its best to sever that connection. At a later stage the patient can shut himself up...as I've had this done by a man of thirty-odd...draw the curtains of his room and as far as possible make himself insulated from the universe in which he finds himself. The patient objected to that

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universe, and objected to me sufficiently strongly to bring his Smith & Wesson 450 Revolver to these sessions which he laid ostentatiously by his side...so's to have available the means of putting a stop to the interpretations. Luckily or unluckily, having been an instructor in small arms, I paid a very great deal of attention to that 450 Smith & Wesson. It did rather distract me from paying attention to what the patient was saying and I think the patient was similarly saved from having to pay too much attention to what I was saying.

Now, another patient was extremely sensitive to sight...intolerably so. So sensitive it was difficult for him to wear the ordinary kind of clothes...because of the colors of the clothes. Another patient did much the same thing, where he found it intolerable to listen to the Philharmonia Orchestra at a time when it was one of the really supreme orchestras... because, according to him, the clarinetist was sharp. I can't tell that kind of thing, but I can believe that he could. And the problem then became how to shut this out. Now, I think that a patient of this kind, or the ones that I have seen at any rate, are very ...sometimes intelligent...sometimes I think wise. I remember one poor wretch who had committed a murder but his sentence was limited because it was discovered that he was of very low

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intelligence. Unfortunately for him, by the time that he saw me, his intelligence was not low enough to be less than that of the British Western Command, who were anxious to punish him if he would not look after his rifle and bring it on parade. He said to me, "Sir, I am not fit to bear arms. I have been allowed out of jail because they said that I could be free if I would serve my country." Very difficult to do...very difficult, if the country insists on giving him a lethal weapon which he knows that he is not capable of carrying.

Now, one can't very well say this about a fetus, but to continue with my science fiction, I can imagine a situation in which living in an environment of amniotic fluid, so to speak, one can be extremely sensitive to certain wavelengths...these oscillations in the water. It'd be useless asking somebody...saying, "When were you born?", because you would get an obstetrician's or a gynecologist's dating...such and such a date. But what I really want to know is when was your character or personality born? Let me put it this way...when do your auditory or optic pits become functional? The variations in pressure of the fluid could have much the same effect as pressing on one's eyeball. One could see light...it might be intolerably bright. One could hear sound which might be

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intolerably loud. Anyhow, is a fetus at full term a character and personality or not? When is that character or personality born? And when does that character or personality forget...get rid of...dispense with all this stuff which it has picked up in the course of existence in a liquid medium? Now, in this liquid medium, it seems to be possible for certain animals, at any rate, to achieve a kind of long distance perception by being capable of smelling things. Dogfish can congregate around some piece of decaying matter and so on. They can smell it out. Mackerel, the same thing.

Now, this appears to be quite an impressive change when this same animal, this fetus, changes into a gaseous medium. It's not a liquid medium, but it is fluid. Therefore, you'll once again get these oscillations in wave senses and so forth, and you can contribute to them. Now I have to borrow this sort of language, because I don't know what language to use when I'm talking about the mind. Believing that there is such a thing and that it t'isn't a sort of elaborate system of gap-filling theories to fill up the space which is occupied by our ignorance. But I certainly do not see why there shouldn't be a carry over of extremely primitive sensitiveness. Let's say that the fetus could be quite a healthy, or sane object, and yet be subjected

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to pressures which were easily communicated long before we would think there was such a thing as a personality. And long after it.

When I was studying in the forecourt of the hospital in which I was studying, at very regular hours a small black cat used to appear, do it's stuff, cover it up neatly, and walk off. It was known as Melanie Klein. "Melanie" because it was black; "Klein" because it was little; and "Melanie Klein" because it had no inhibitions. I have a sort of feeling that this is repeated, as it were, on a rather different level of the helical progress of the human mind. (I'm borrowing this idea from the molecular distribution of the DNA molecule.) One comes back to these same things, but again on a somewhat different level. What we, I think, are trying to do is to get back on these different levels, but without losing this vital contribution which is made by these archaisms. And that, I think is time that I stopped, to say the least.